

From O. D. Richardson

Los Angeles City College
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Dear Friends:

In the Student Nisei, it now appears, we had in a few dramatic months a preview of what the war would bring to the American Japanese. They have acted exactly as the Nisei acted in City College. We were unable to interest the Kibei in our plans for absorbing the Japanese in American life, and in the centers the Kibei have shown themselves most to be strongly anti-American. Just as the larger number of the Nisei showed that they were not interested in the problems of their people, so, since the evacuation, they have formulated no plan to get out of their present situation. Just as most of them thought first of their own plans and individual interests in dates, parties and well-paying jobs, and only second of their racial group and its future in America; just so they do now. Just as they would not read then, and did not know what was happening, either in the day-to-day or larger sense, so most of them today are reading nothing and are deciding their futures in rumor, fears, confusion, and the narrow range of their former experiences. Just as it was easier for the majority of the City College Nisei to continue the daily round in the "Little Tokyo" atmosphere than to live with the better Caucasians and find new experiences in common with them, so now it is easier for them to sit in the centers, suspicious and resentful of all Caucasians, complaining of racial inequality, but unwilling to gain the respect and affection of the persons they say they wish to be their fellow-citizens. The day of making up one's mind is here for all of us, Caucasians and Nisei alike, the day of holding to the things we want most and giving up the things which are incompatible with what we want most. Too many of us do not want to make up our minds, we want everything. What the Nisei do not seem to see is that they are making up their minds by not making them up.

The Nisei are splitting into two groups: the first is committed to America; the second is not committed to anything. This last is the same as being committed against America. Perhaps in different circumstances it would not be, but it is here and now. As a minority from an enemy country, their whole future is insecure. The only thing which can save them from discriminatory laws is public good-will. That good-will can be won if the Nisei were to throw themselves enthusiastically into the war on our side. Apathy or indifference will convince the Caucasians that the Nisei are Japanese. One group is thinking of itself as American. But a far larger group has chosen indifference, or open hostility. The first group has been silenced in many Centers. Tayama, Tanaka, Kido and others have been beaten. It has become dangerous for a person to say that he believed in the Caucasians and would cooperate with them.

The American public has not forgotten this fact.

I believe the future of the Nisei who are now willing to work with the Caucasians, fight with them, and trust them is pretty clear. These Nisei will be protected from discriminatory laws by their entry into the army and their cooperative stand. Their rights of citizenship will not be abridged. People like myself who have the warmest personal attachment for certain individuals and their families will be able to help them get started after the war. They will enter the full current of American life, will make a very distinguished contribution to it, and we will be proud to know them as among our dearest friends. As the Sansei increase in number it will be increasingly difficult to discover any difference between their opportunities and those of any other third-generation group.

But the larger group of Nisei, the group which is now hesitating, will not be protected from harsh discriminatory laws, nor will it have the support of Caucasians friends. Many persons who opposed the evacuation of the Japanese are now coming to believe it was a good thing. They are not so much interested in helping the Nisei become Americans in every sense, since it looks as though a good many Nisei do not care about becoming Americans. Some Nisei, and perhaps most of the Kibei, are working themselves into such a state of mind that we will have to send them away. Perhaps it would be a good thing, because they and their acts will always be a source of ill-will and danger for the truly American Japanese. Perhaps some of them might interpret such a letter as this as meaning that the Americans must be truly desperate to have to beg help from the Japanese. Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.

My hat is off to you fellows of the Student Nisei, and your kind in all the Centers. You had courage and brains, and through you the Nisei are going to have a future in America. If you will allow me to teach the Sansei I shall be very well satisfied.

A SOCIAL PLAN FOR MINORITY GROUPS

A minority group, racial or religious, never gets quite fair treatment. Unfair treatment causes hatred, and hatred causes more unfair treatment. This condition/ is dangerous to the United States for it is the negation of our religion and our democratic principles. It is dangerous to any minority for history is full of examples of minority groups who became "untouchables". But until a minority group/ decides to break the fatal circle with an intelligent plan, and find leaders who can persuade their people to follow that plan, there can be no remedy. Equality cannot be given or legislated. It must be won, and won by some careful plan, well conceived, and followed vigorously for at least a generation.

Axiom: People will trust you and accept you, in time, if you conform to the folk-pattern: that group of customs which make the Americans Americans, the Chinese Chinese, the Russians Russians, the Romans Romans. These customs often seem odd, but there is always a good reason for them in the life of that particular people.

Don'ts for Racial Minorities:

1. You must decide which of the customs of a country are merely a passing fashion, and which are the roots of its character. No one can become an American (though lots have tried) by learning to jitter-bug, drive a car, to neck in quiet lanes, drink ice cream sodas, heat a house with an automatic gas furnace or get a divorce.
2. You cannot become an American by imitating the habits of people who are not respected by the best of the Americans.
3. America has quite a reputation in Europe and Asia as a place where people care only for making money. Some immigrants imagine they are fitting into the life of this country when they come here just to make money. They soon find that people who come here just to make money are very much disliked. America is something you must belong to, not something you purchase. People who try to make money without "belonging" soon find that other people make it hard for them to make money, and treat them with hostility. Sometimes the immigrant calls this racial discrimination. It is not racial discrimination. It will happen in any country and in any group where people get the idea that a stranger wants to share the best they have without being one of them, and by that I mean acting as they act, suffering when they suffer, giving when they give.
4. Do not earn your money here and plan to spend it abroad.

5. Live in as good a house as the older Americans who make what you do. If you live in a shack or hovel, the Americans will argue that you are trying to reduce the standard of living, or that you are sub-human and do not want to live decently, or that you are not living in America at all, but are saving your money to spend in some foreign land. They will not like you for any of these.
6. Do not put off learning English.
7. Go out with and plan to marry a young person of your own race.
8. Do not throw in your money, especially on cheap goods.
9. Never lose respect for the people of your ancestry and the things they have accomplished. The Americans have no use for people who act ashamed of their parentage, and who try to become Americans in six months. They believe that such persons are either dishonest or too shallow to be a credit to any nation. Becoming an American is a gradual, slow process. We are proud of our ancestors, and do not respect those who are not proud of theirs. We think too well of ourselves to believe that any person can become one of us by learning a few wise-cracks, sneering at his forbears, and buying a new suit of clothes.
10. As immigrants and the children of immigrants you will often live in poor districts, and the members of the majority race you meet will frequently be persons who are not very much respected by their own people. The failures of one race are always those who most resent a different race. You must make your friends among the better-educated and more successful people of the majority race.
11. Never act ashamed of your own people, or try to escape their problems by deserting them.
12. Study the successful Americans carefully, and find out what makes one American popular with other Americans. Then try to win good-will in the same manner.
13. If people are rude to you, and try to make it hard for you to make a living, keep your head. Remember what you want: fair treatment. You can never gain it by feeling sorry for yourself, or planning for the time when you can be rude and hateful back again.
14. The more you learn about America, its land, peoples, history, songs, books, heroes, the less of a stranger you will feel in it. True, many Americans do not know much of these things. Could you expect to be successful in any country by imitating the least successful of its people?
15. Never/ cover hurt feeling with a loud, contemptuous manner.